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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU PREL KPAO
SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
FRIDAY, MAY 29, 2009

In Today's Papers

PKK Landmine Kills Six Soldiers in Hakkari
Media outlets report that at 23:40 Wednesday night, six soldiers were killed and 11 others wounded when a landmine exploded in Cukurca town in Hakkari province near the border with Iraq. The remote-controlled blast occurred when a military vehicle carrying soldiers ran over a landmine believed to have been planted by the PKK. Papers report the Turkish military said that right after the attack, F-16 fighter jets that took off from Diyarbakir and attacked a "crowded group of the PKK terrorists in the region of Avasin-Basyan" in northern Iraq.

The pro-Kurdish DTP leader Ahmet Turk released a statement expressing "deep regret" about the death of the soldiers. Turk said those supporting a democratic settlement to the Kurdish question meant people had to "take their fingers off the trigger." Liberal Radikal notes Turk used to criticize the army for ignoring the ceasefire declared by the PKK. Yesterday's statement, however, was different, says Radikal, quoting Turk: "The killings must stop in order to clear the way for politics. We will not be able to solve our problems while the killings continue." Mainstream Hurriyet reports analysts said Turk's condolences came swiftly and might suggest that the DTP does not want to undermine the political efforts aimed at ending the conflict. In "Nasty Attack on A Historic Opportunity for Peace," mainstream Vatan writes "the PKK martyred six soldiers at a time when Turkey's president, its government and opposition were taking 'historic steps' to end terror." Mainstream Sabah strikes a similar tone, and quotes analysts as saying the deadly attack came in the aftermath of the words of President Gul that there was a "historic opportunity" for a settlement in the Kurdish issue and the statement of CHP leader Baykal that the PKK "could be granted amnesty if it agrees to lay down its weapons."

Hurriyet and the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carry a statement by the U.S. Ankara Embassy, which denounces the attack. Hurriyet reports the statement reads, "We will continue our cooperation with Turkey against PKK terrorism. We are also encouraged by the constructive statements by Turkish leaders calling for an end to

violence and a commitment to resolve differences through peaceful means."

'44-Year Lease' Article Removed from AKP's Mine-Sweeping Bill
Media outlets report the AKP government stepped back in the face of objections coming from the opposition to a controversial draft for sweeping the landmines along the border with Syria. On Thursday, the AKP government withdrew the bill in order to resubmit it to the parliament again on Tuesday, with the article allowing the land to be leased for 44 years after the sweep is done. Mainstream Hurriyet says PM Erdogan has approved the changes to the bill.

Meanwhile, CHP Leader Deniz Baykal said, "The lands should be allocated to local people to improve the regional economy. The territory can be turned into a haven of agriculture under the state's guidance."

Editorial Commentary on the Debate on Sweeping Landmines

Yalcin Dogan wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "The landmine-sweeping bill did not even get support from the ruling AKP members. The deliberate refusal to attend the parliament's debates forced the Prime Minister to reevaluate the situation, which ended up sending the bill back to the commission process."

Taha Kivanc wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "It was wrong from the beginning to allow the use of territory for 44 years. It was also wrong to put pressure on members of the parliament by imposing the bill's content. Now the best thing is to separate the mine sweep and the use of land since the bill has been sent back to

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the parliamentary commission. The use of the cleaned land should go to one of the local firms anyway."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Let's hope, even though belatedly, the government has realized the fact that the mine-sweeping bill was improperly composed. There is a constant talk about the opposition being an obstacle in the passage of the bill, but fact of the matter is that it was not supported by a significant number of AKP members either. One thing is very clear: If the revised bill separates mine sweeping and permission for the land for farming, support from the opposition parties is ensured."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "The ruling AKP made a mistake by insisting and imposing the terms as described in the poorly drafted mine-sweeping bill. Despite the lack of support from its members, the AKP continued to force the debates. The whole thing indicates a second political wound for the PM after the local election results."

Pro-Kurdish DTP Drafts New Constitution

Mainstream Vatan reports Turkey's main Kurdish opposition party DTP was drafting a new constitution in an effort to contribute to the resolution of the Kurdish question. The draft prepared by DTP includes demands for "democratic autonomy" and "education in the Kurdish language." It also brings changes in the structure of institutions like the High Board of Judges and Prosecutors, the Higher Education Board (YOK) and the National Security Council (MGK).

Dervis Advises Turkey to Strike Deal with the IMF
Mainstream Hurriyet reports the Brookings Institute deputy chair Kemal Dervis told the Forum Istanbul meetings on the global economic downturn that Turkey needs short term measures to revive domestic demand and long term measures aimed at creating a strong financial structure. On a question regarding whether Turkey could attain medium-term fiscal discipline without the IMF, Dervis stressed the importance of striking a deal with the IMF, "The IMF has significant amount of funds, which are in high demand. It'd be good if Turkey used those funds. A constructive and forward-looking agreement should be made which takes Turkey's existing conditions into consideration."

Meanwhile, papers report State Minister Ali Babacan sent a "message of confidence" to the business world, saying "Even if the IMF funds

arrive, we will not loosen fiscal discipline."

YOK Increases Theology Students by 115 Percent (Hurriyet)
Mainstream Hurriyet reports Turkey's Higher Education Council (YOK) board has increased the capacity of theology faculties by 115 percent for the next education year, moving up the existing number of 2680 theology students to 5620. State universities were given a 15 percent increase while foundation universities were allowed a 20 percent increase.

The Eastern Mediterranean Heats Up (Cumhuriyet)
Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports "The Greek Cypriots' latest diplomatic maneuver could create serious tensions between the U.S. and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean." The paper says that the Greek Cypriots' decision to allow a U.S. company to explore for oil and natural gas "violates international and could lead to a confrontation between the U.S. and Turkey," as "the area off the SW coast of Cyprus is within Turkey's maritime jurisdiction."

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued today a statement on the issue and said the following: "Such efforts from Greek Cypriot Administration are not compatible with the ongoing comprehensive negotiation process. These actions have a potential to cause tension and exhibit a lack of legality, which also damage the Turkish Cypriot people's equal rights and interests on the island's natural resources. It was registered by the UN that Turkey has

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fundamental rights and interests on sea fields located 32016'18" of the East Longitude. Naturally Turkey will maintain these rights. Under this framework, it is our hope to see actions with common sense to avoid tension-causing during the ongoing negotiation process."

Editorial Commentary on Turkish-American Relations

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Istanbul's Bahcesehir University is hosting a conference on Turkish-American ties, an event organized by the university's Center for American Research. There are vast variety of issues, from Iraq to Afghanistan to the Caucasus and the Middle East, that the two countries engage in close cooperation. From a general perspective, there are many similarities between Turkish and American foreign policy lines especially with the Obama administration's priorities. However certain differences come up when details and strategies are concerned. Cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. will continue to go smoothly until one of these differences becomes a point of crisis. The Iran nuclear issue, for instance, is subject to be problematic in the days ahead. Most likely Washington will work on sanctions against Iran through the United Nations before the end of 2009. It remains to be seen how Ankara will respond to that."

Israel Rebuffs the U.S. (Milliyet)

Media note Israel has not heeded Secretary Clinton's call to halt the construction of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land in the West Bank. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "A Gamble from Israel to The U.S." and reports, "Despite the Obama administration's call to end the spread of Israeli settlements, settlement construction continues." Liberal Radikal agrees in, "Israel Is Gambling with The U.S.," and notes, "While Obama is receiving Palestinian Leader Abbas, Israel is gambling with the U.S. by continuing to construct Jewish settlements in the West Bank." Leftist Taraf headlines, "The U.S. Says 'Stop' to Israel," and reports, "U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that she wants Israel to stop constructing settlements on Palestinian land," but "The Israeli government said they would continue with the settlements until the peace talks."

Iraq Abuse Photos Show Torture, Rape

Media outlets report former U.S. general Antonio Taguba told Britain's Daily Telegraph that graphic images of rape and torture are among the photos of Iraqi prisoner abuse that President Obama's administration does not want released. Mainstream Sabah carries the headline, "Censor to Rape Photos." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet and mainstream Hurriyet quote Taguba, who oversaw the U.S. investigation into the abuses at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison, as

saying he "agreed with Obama's decision not to release the pictures." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak and Zaman report according to the Telegraph, the new photos depicted "much more serious abuses than previously documented" in Abu Ghraib. Liberal Radikal quotes the general as saying "it's enough to describe the photos as horrendous."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- 72 civic organizations in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir released a statement in support of the statements of President Gul regarding the Kurdish issue, and urged the PKK to support the peace process.

- On Thursday, 35 were detained in anti-PKK operations in five provinces including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Manisa and Van. The offices of public workers union KESK and education workers' union Egitim-Sen have also been searched in connection with the investigation.

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- The Chief of the military General Staff (TGS), General Ilker Basbug is visiting the U.S. as the official guest of Admiral Michael Mullen; Basbug will also attend the American Turkish Council meetings in Washington.

- On Friday, President Abdullah Gul will travel from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan on the last leg of his tour of Central Asia.

- The Turkish Central Bank says there were improvements in economic indicators over the recent months.

World

- U.S. seismologists say the nuclear bomb detonated by North Korea this week was about five times more powerful than the country's 2006 test.

- French President Sarkozy cancels his June 2 trip to Sweden, allegedly in reaction to the support Swedish FM Carl Bildt gives to Turkey's EU membership.

- Muslim migrants in Greece will rally to press the police and the related ministry to apologize for a recent incident when a policeman defaced a Koran.

- UNSYG special advisor on Cyprus Alexander Downer says there were no plans to change the structure of the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

- The UN labor agency ILO says the ranks of the unemployed could swell by 50.4 million worldwide this year because of the economic downturn.

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